Opera in the late eighteenth century

Lecture 4 | Music in the Classical and Romantic Eras MCGY2612

21 March 2011

Dr David Larkin | Lecturer in Music

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Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck, by Josef-Sifrède Duplessis (1775)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, by Barbara Kraft (1819) [sic]
Ludwig van Beethoven, by W. J Mähler (1804)
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Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Musicology Colloquium Series

The SCM MCS proudly presents

for one hour only

David Larkin

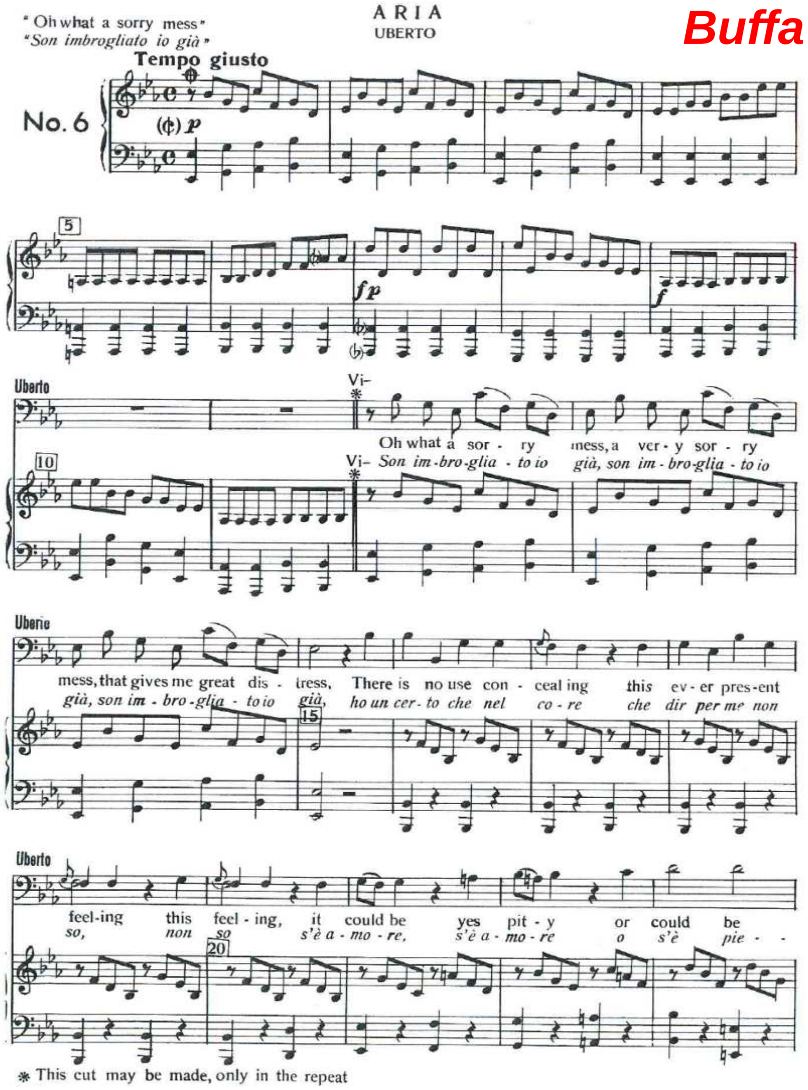
in a lecture entitled

‘One of the past’: Strauss’s self-image and the dynamics of history

Room 3003, this Wed @ 4pm. Seats can be reserved through the usual outlets (no booking fees apply)

ITALIAN OPERA TYPES

Buffa **vs** ***Seria***



G.B. Pergolesi, 'Son imbrogliato', from *La Serva Padrona* (1732)

A section

A new tempeſtuous Gloom I find,

O'er ſpreading faſt my alter'd Mind:

As when oe'r Heaven's fair Serene,

At firſt ſome Cloud, but faintly ſeen,

Scuds on; and gathering by Degrees,

Involves at laſt both Skies and Seas.

B section (not shown)

So Jealouſy does now o'er-rule

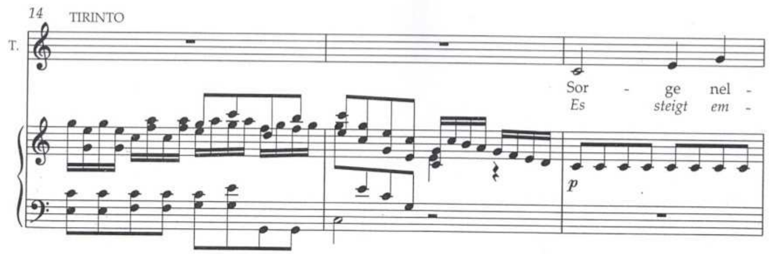
The calmer Temper of my Soul,

And ſpreads around its gloomy Veil:

While more the angry Blasts may ſwell,

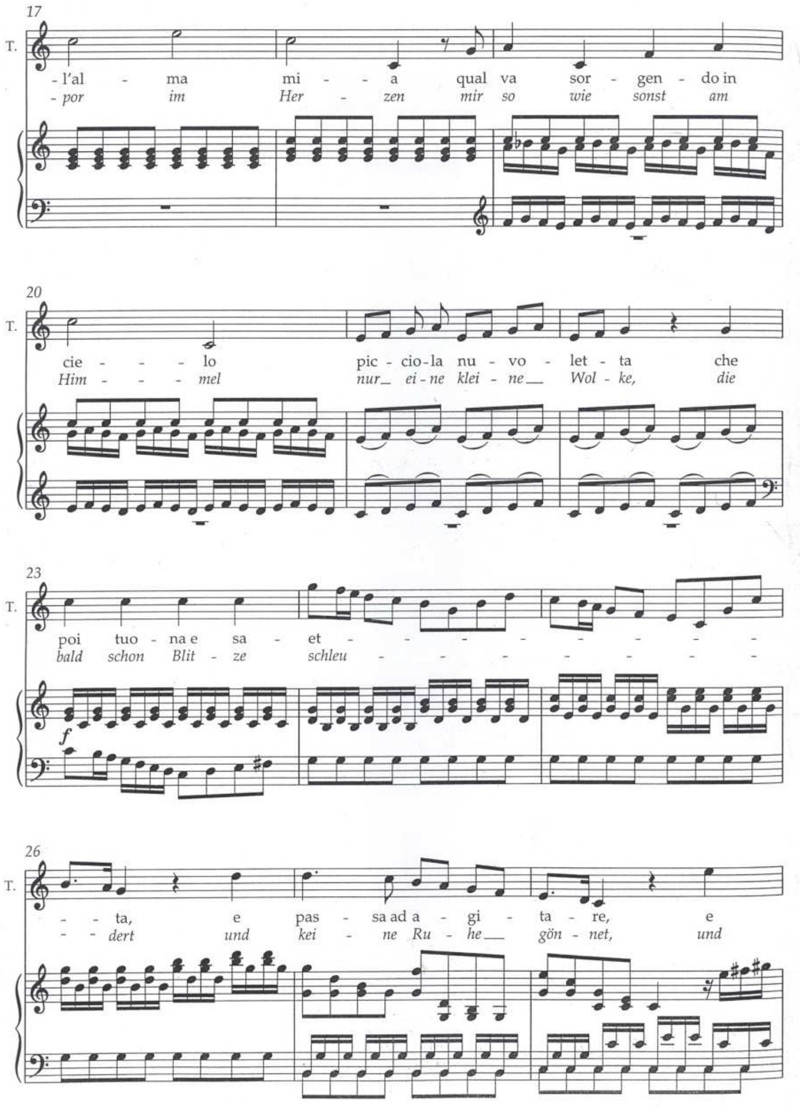
Till every Paſſage of my Breaſt,

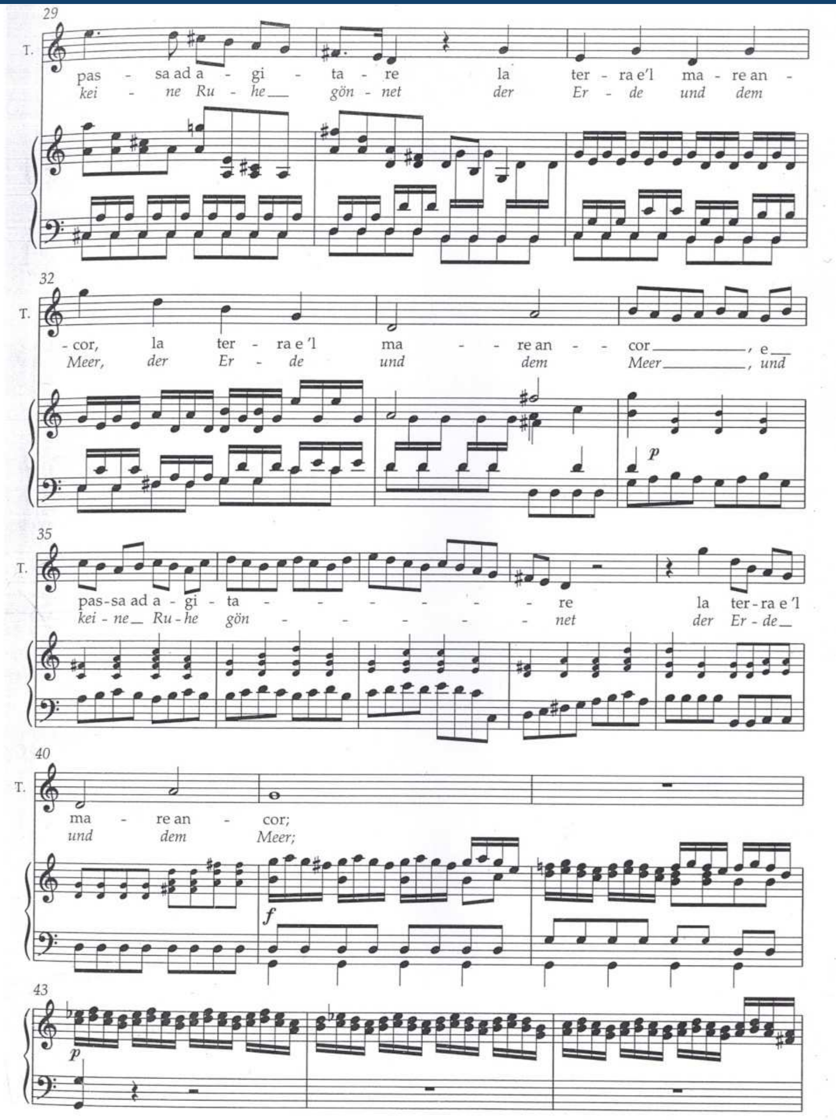
Is by the raging Storm poſſeſt.



G. F. Handel, 'Sorge nell'alma mia', from *Imeneo* (1740)

ITALIAN OPERA SERIA c.1740





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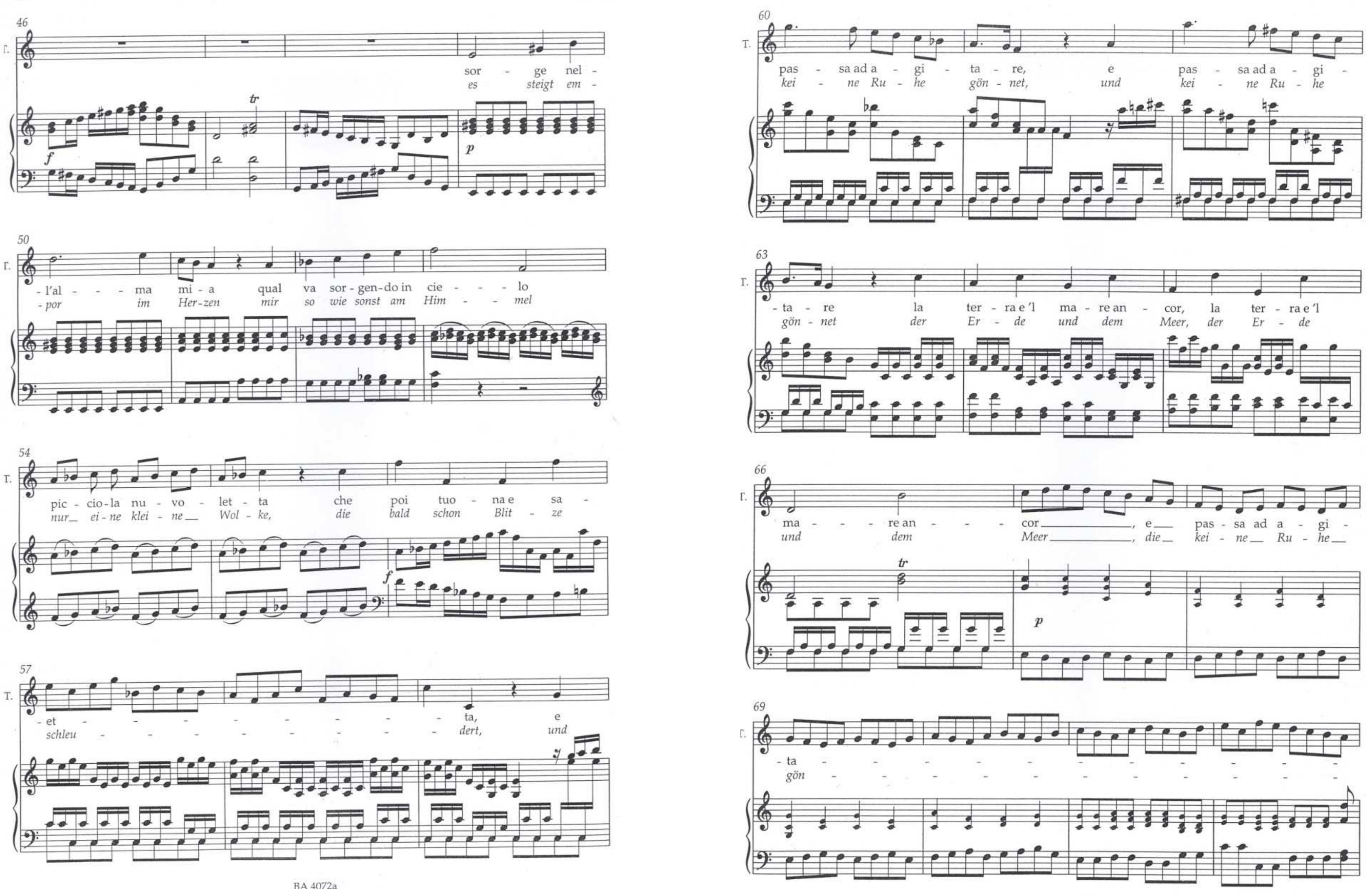

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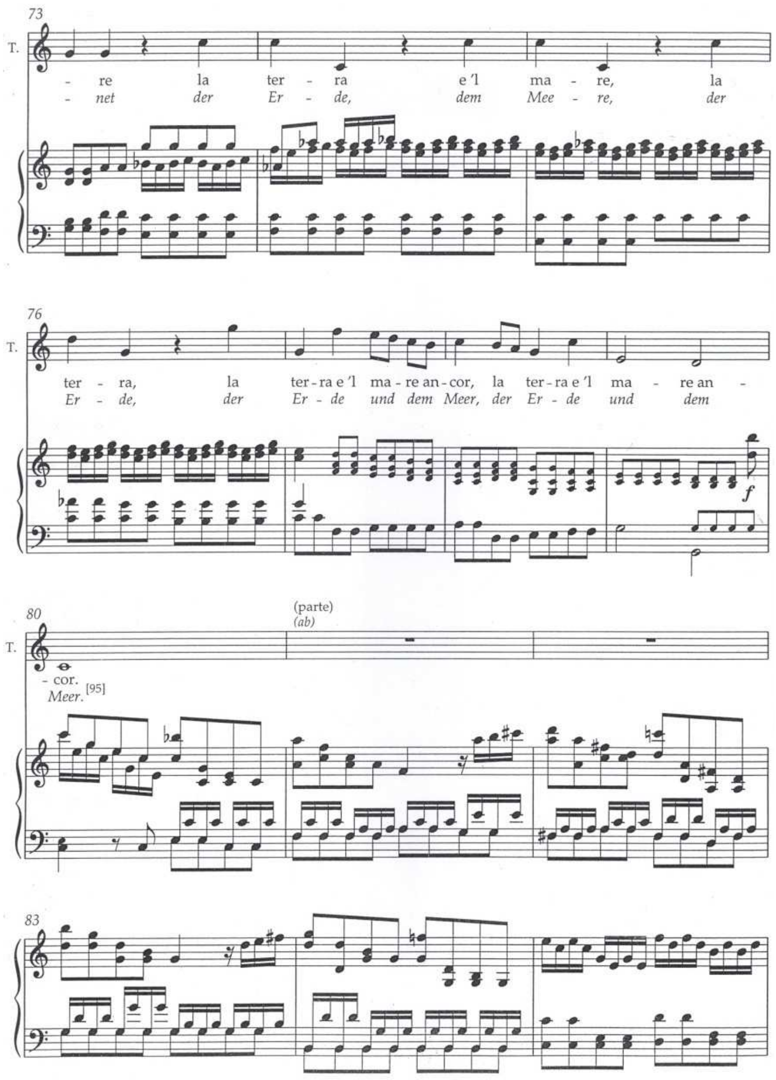

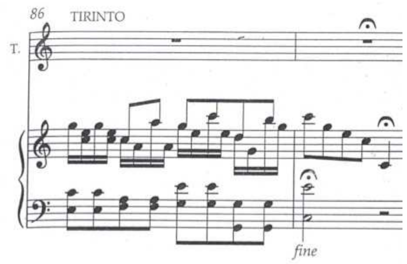

G. F. Handel, ‘Sorge nell’alma mia’, from *Imeneo* (1740)

18C OPERA TYPES – A BRIEF GLOSSARY

Country	Type of opera	Characteristics
Italy	Opera seria	Lit. ‘serious opera’; highly stylised in both music (based on the regular alternation of recitative and aria) and plot (mythological or heroic subjects)
	Opera buffa	Lit. ‘comic opera’, known at the time as *dramma giocoso*; bourgeois entertainment featuring ordinary characters. Subtypes include the *intermezzo*
	Opera semiseria	A type of comic opera which aims for greater emotional range than farce; may touch on serious issues, but ends happily
France	Tragédie lyrique	Lit. ‘lyrical tragedy’, known at the time as *tragédie en musique*; serious opera codified by Lully, in 5 Acts, with a highly stylised use of music and dance
	Opéra comique	Comic opera, similar to *opera buffa*, but with spoken dialogue instead of recitatives
	Comédie larmoyante	Lit. ‘tearful comedy’; similar to semiseria opera, with much use of pathos
Germany	Singspiel	Folk opera in German, generally comic, uses spoken dialogue
England	Ballad opera	Play punctuated by English-language set numbers which are often popular folk tunes; in vogue in the 1730s

GLUCK’S MAJOR WORKS (SELECTIVE)

Viennese reform operas

- › *Orfeo ed Euridice* (pf 1762, rev. for Paris 1774)
- › *Alceste* (fp 1767)
- › *Paride ed Elena* (1770)
  - Librettist for all three: Ranieri de’ Calzabigi (1714-1795)

‘Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck’ (1775)
Artist: Josef-Sifrède Duplessis

Important later works

- › *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774)
- › *Armide* (1777)
- › *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779)

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GLUCK, PREFACE TO *ALCESTE* (1769) [1/2]

› I proposed to restrict the music to its true function of serving the poem in the expression and in the situations of the story without interrupting the action or cooling it down with useless, superfluous ornaments [...]

› Therefore, I have not seen fit to arrest an actor in the heat of dialogue to make him wait out a tedious *ritornello* [*orchestral introduction*], or to stop him in mid-word over a favourable vowel, or to show off the nimbleness of his fine voice by means of a lengthy passage, or to purchase time with the Orchestra while he took breath for a cadenza [...] or to end an aria at a point where its sense may well be incomplete, in order to give the singer an opportunity to display his whimsical capacity to vary a passage in so many different ways; in short, I have endeavoured to banish all those abuses against which common sense and reason have for so long cried out in vain.

GLUCK, PREFACE TO *ALCESTE* (1769) [2/2]

- It occurred to me that the overture ought to prepare the audience for the events to be presented, that it ought, so to speak, to set the theme; that the intervention of instrumental music ought to be determined by and reflect the interests and the passion [of the moment] and not cause the dialogue to be so forcibly split up into recitatives and arias, nor make mincemeat of sentences or interrupt inopportunely the impetus of the action.
- I further imagined that my greatest labour should consist in the search for a beautiful simplicity; and I have avoided making a display of difficulties at the expense of clarity [...]

Weiss/Taruskin 1984: 301-302

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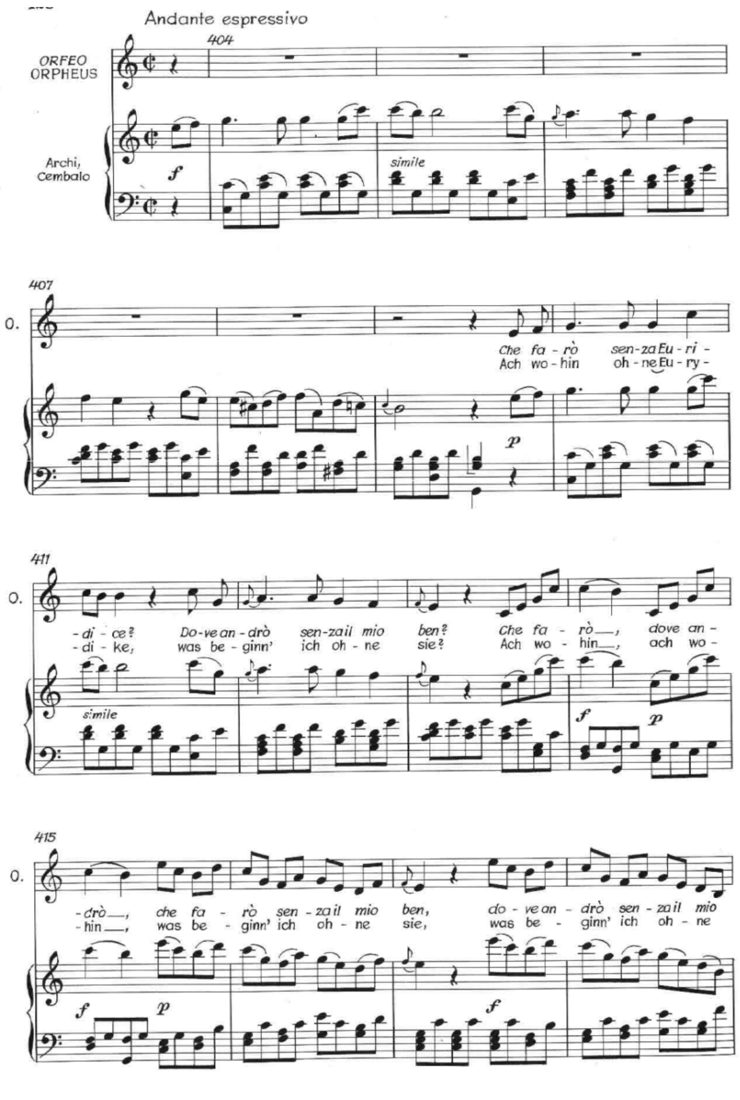
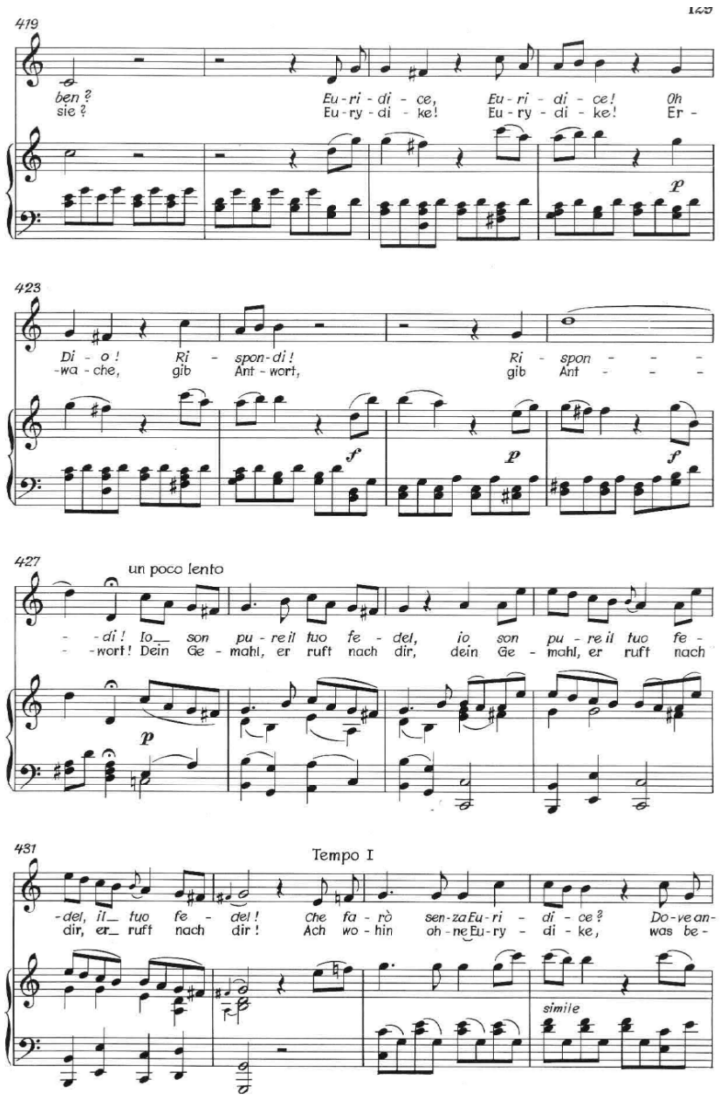
GLUCK’S ‘BEAUTIFUL SIMPLICITY’





Orfeo ed Euridice: Act III, aria: ‘What will I do without Eurydice, where will I go without my love? Eurydice, Eurydice! O heavens! Answer! I am still true to you!

GLUCK THE DRAMATIST [ACT II]

Act 2

A fearsome cavernous region beyond the river Cocytus,
darkened from afar by gloomy smoke lit up by flames
which envelops that whole dreaded abode.

[…]

Ballet *Presto*

Chorus

Who is this
who draws near to us
through the gloom of Erebus
in the footsteps of Hercules
and of Pirithous?
May the savage Eumenides
overwhelm him with horror,
and the howls of Cerberus
terrify him
if he is not a god.

They dance, whirling round Orpheus, to frighten him.

Ballet *Maestoso*

ORPHEUS

Oh be merciful to me,
ye Furies, ye spectres, ye angry shades!

CHORUS

No! No! No!

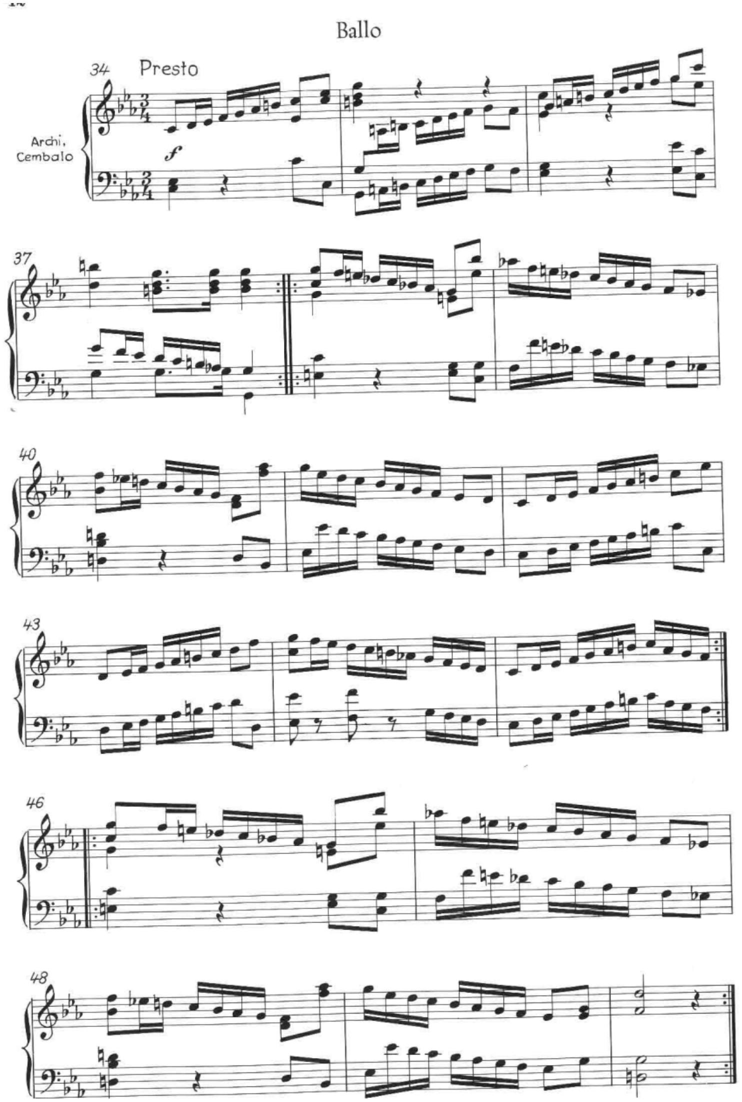
ORPHEUS

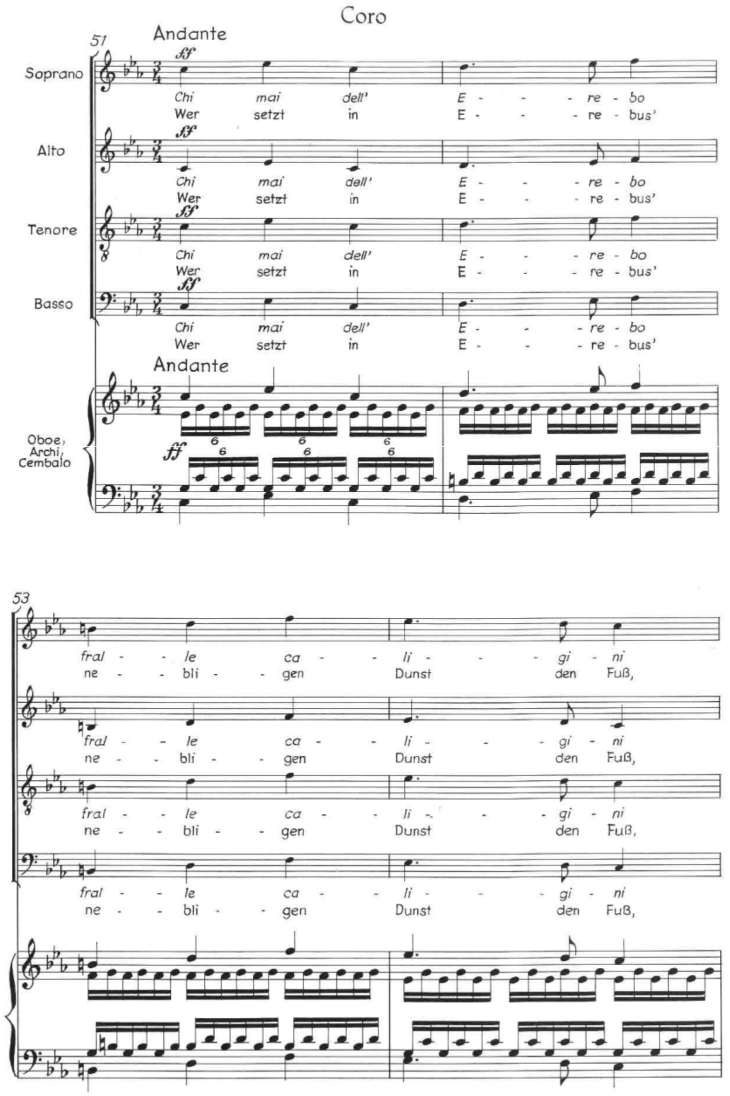
May my cruel grief
at least earn your pity!

Chorus

Wretched youth,
what seek you? What is your purpose? [...]

GLUCK THE DRAMATIST [ACT II]





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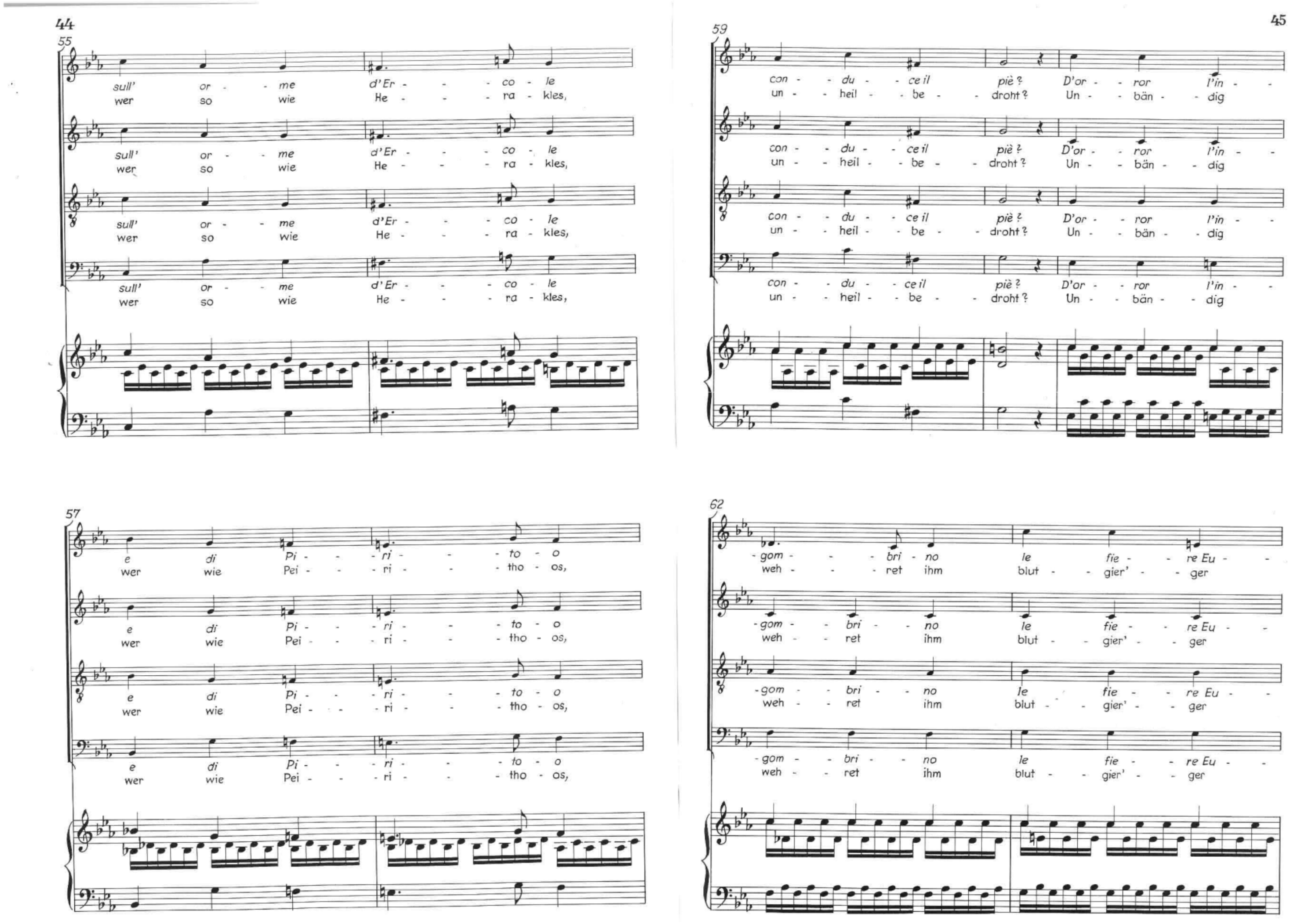

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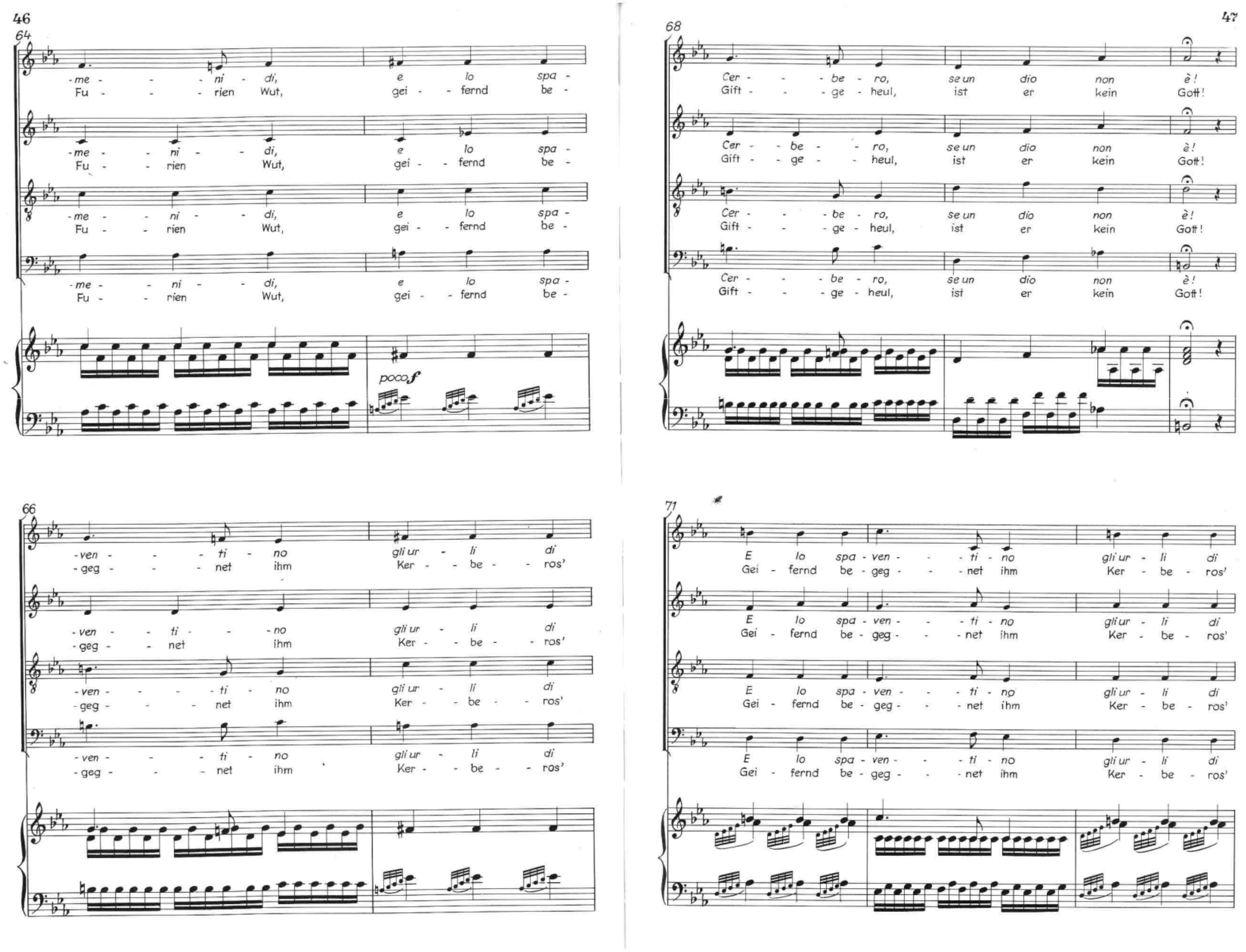

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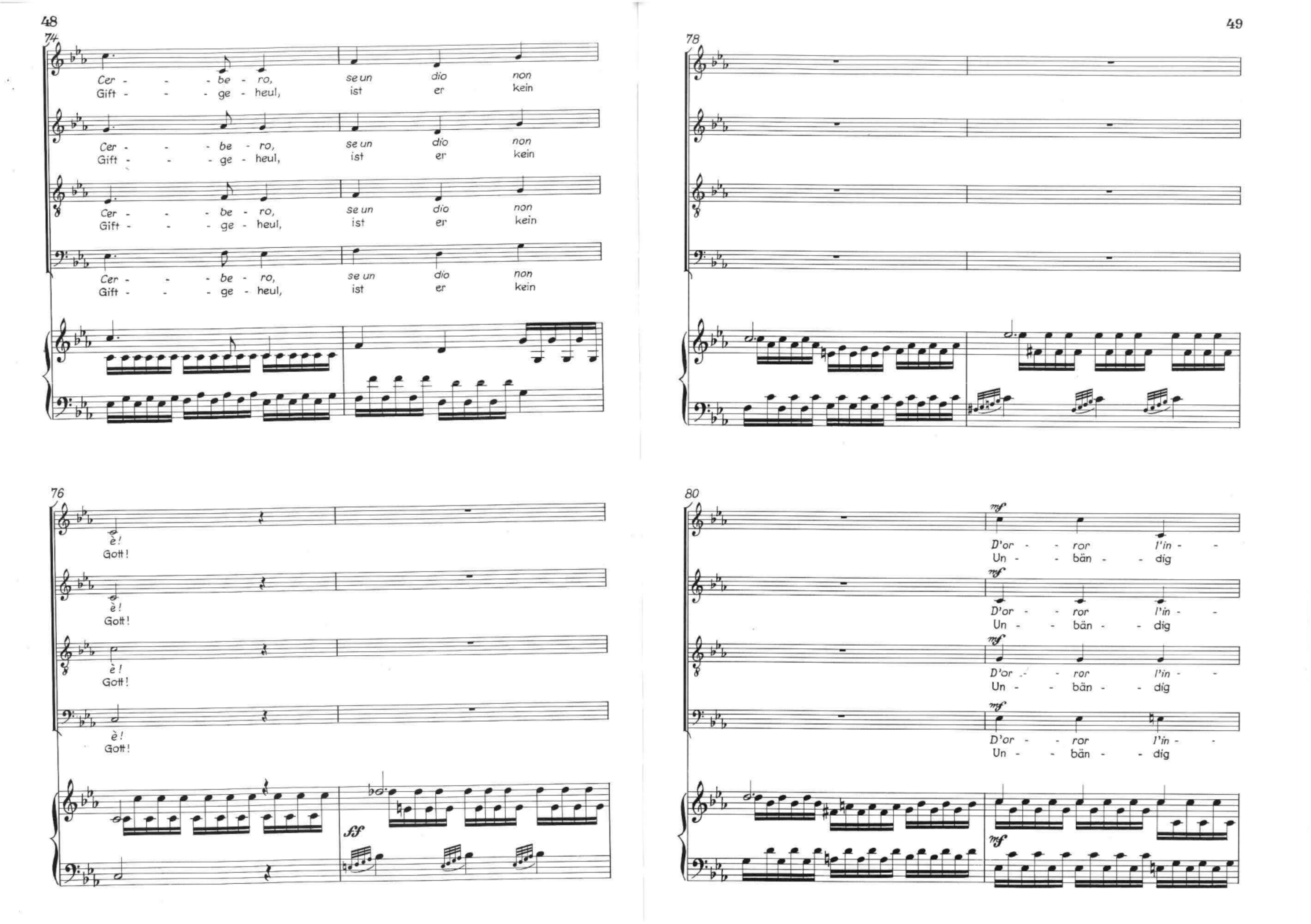

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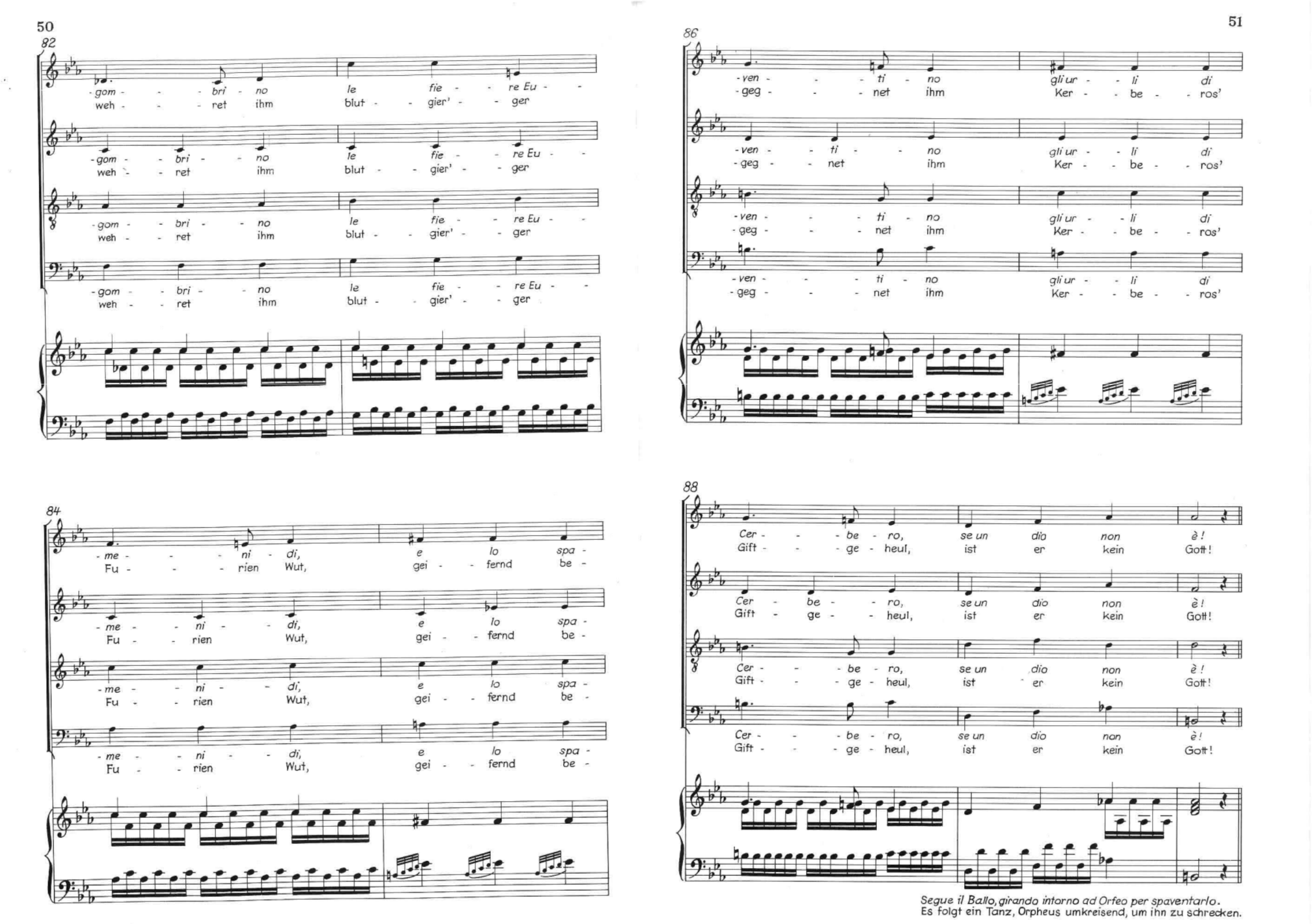

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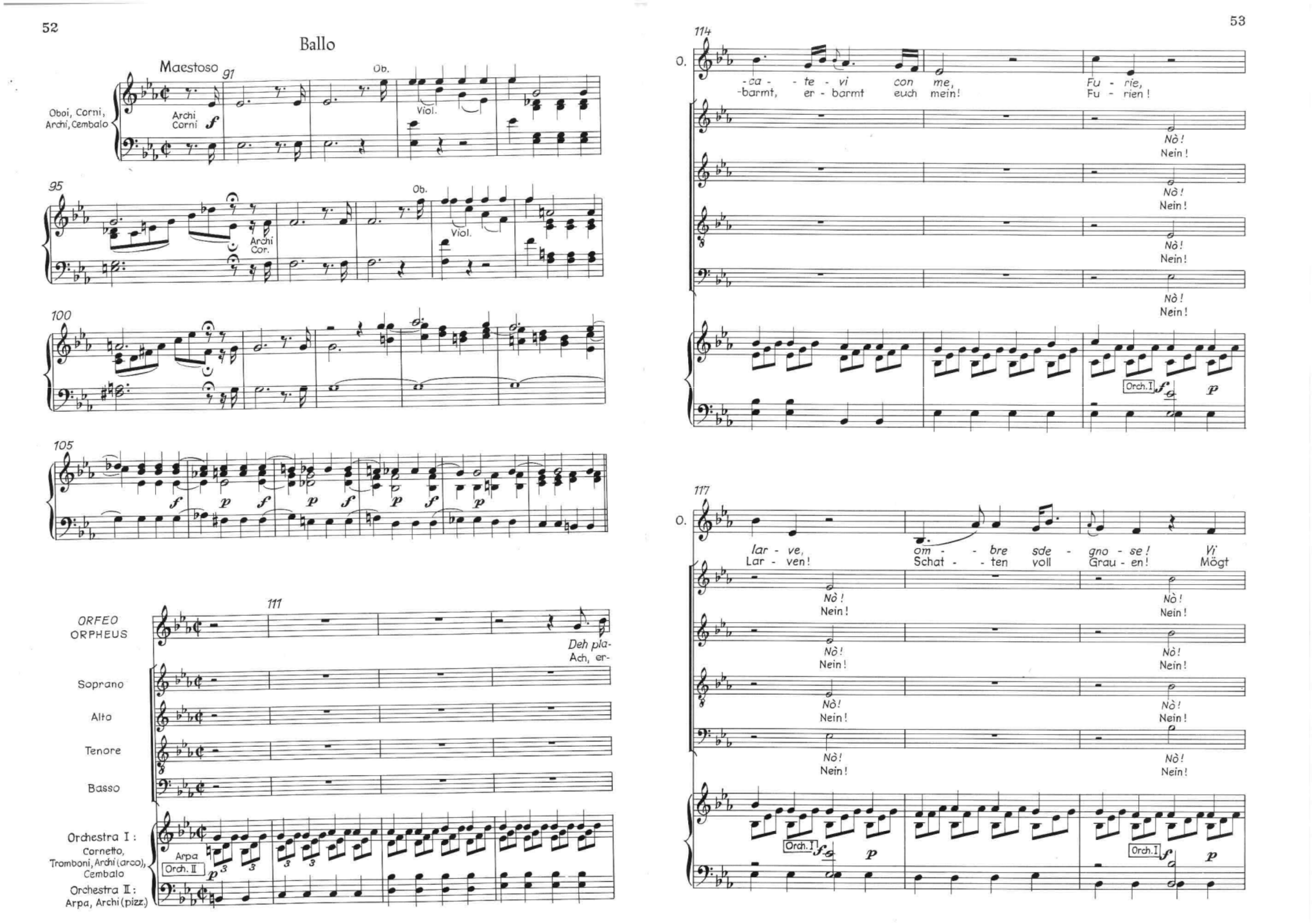

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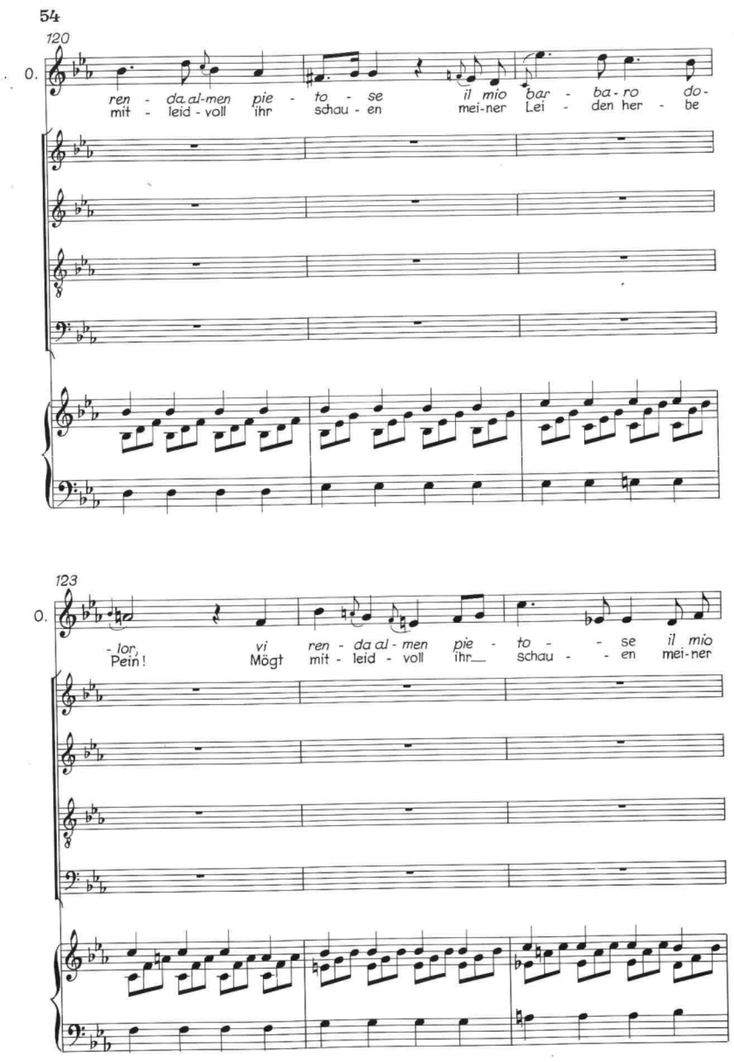

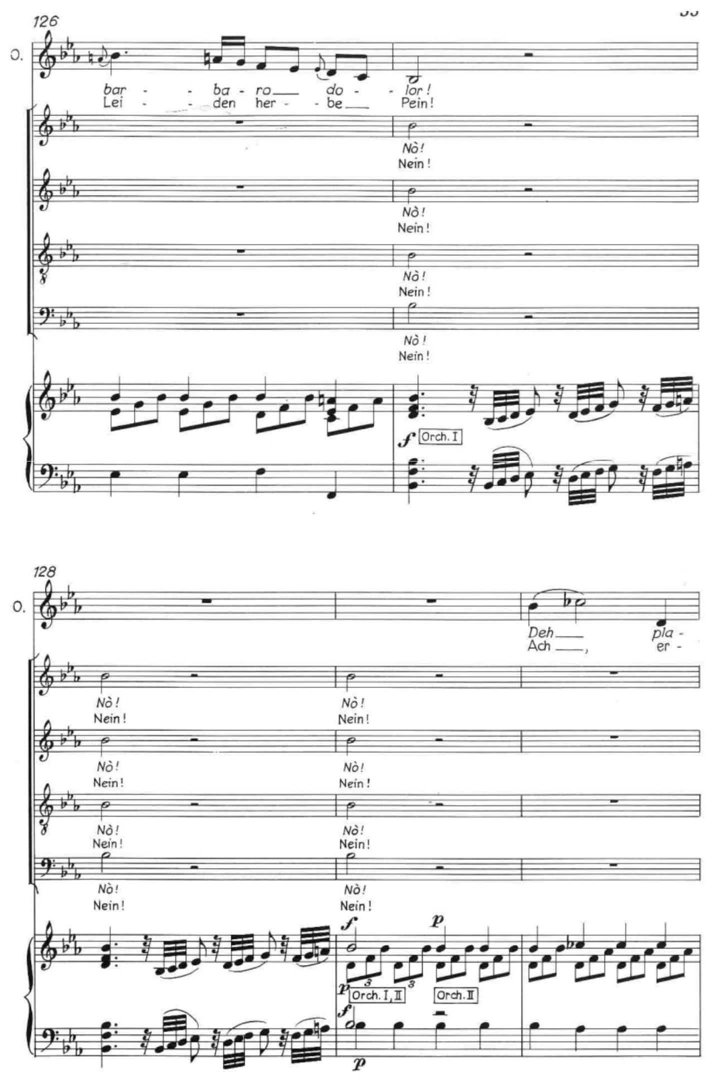

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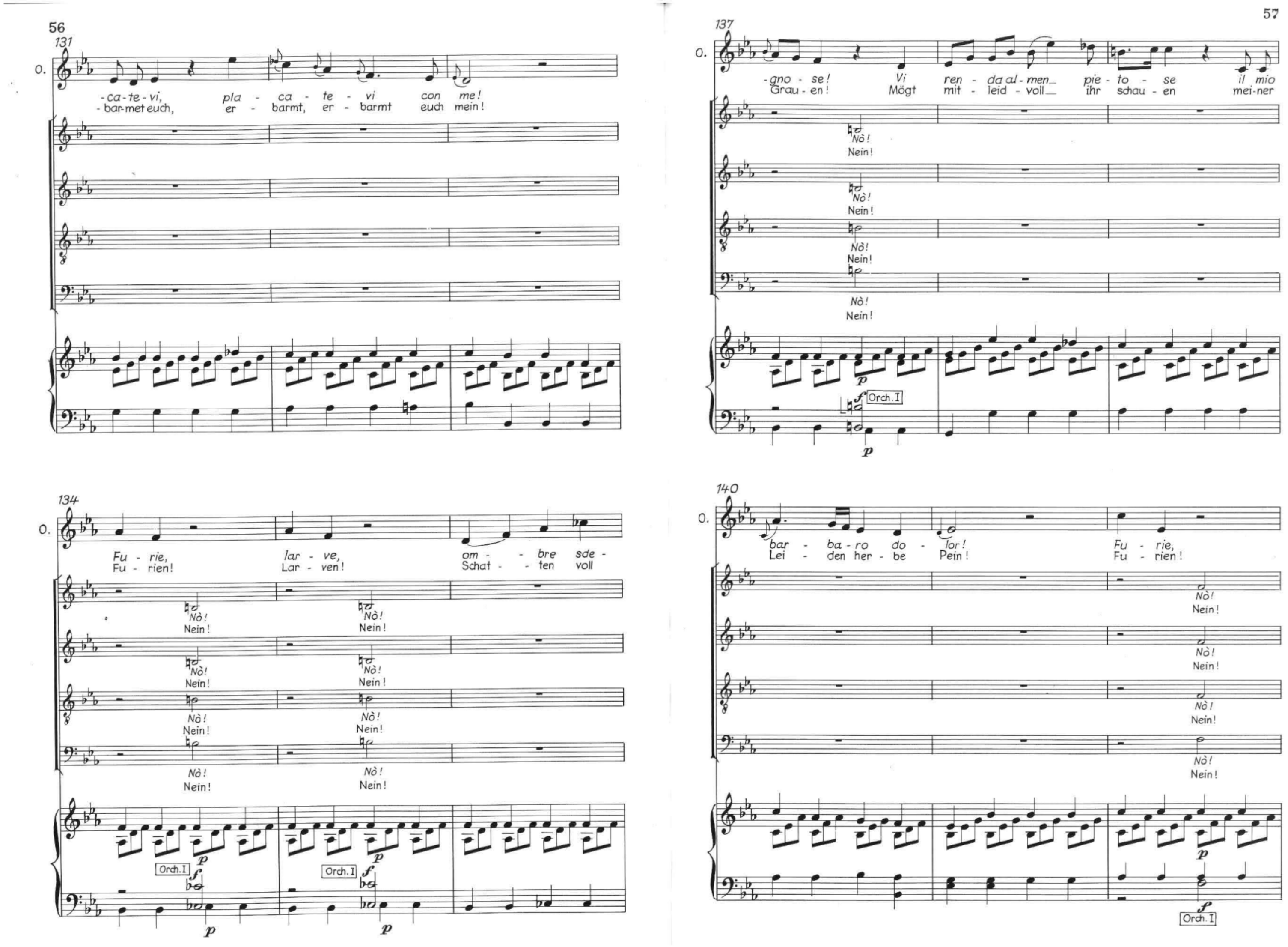

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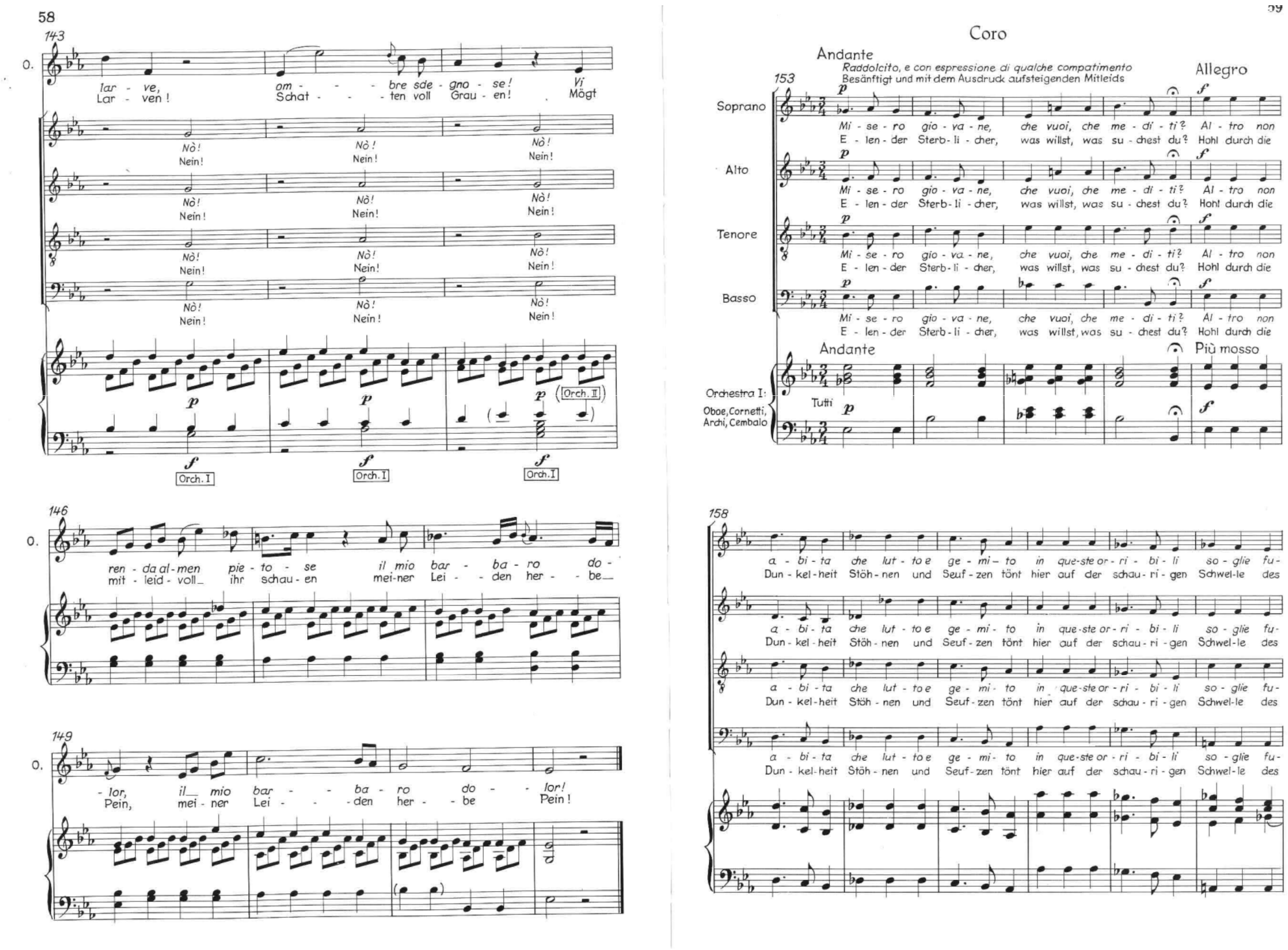

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OPERA TERMINOLOGY

Term	Significance
Number	Set pieces; any musical entity that forms a self-sufficient unit, marked off by a recognizable beginning and end (with a space for applause). Arias, ensembles and choruses are all examples of operatic numbers
Scene	A portion of an act during which the characters on the stage remain unchanged (thus demarcated by an entrance or an exit). In German, the equivalent term at the end of 18C was 'Auftritt' (entrance)
Act	Main division of an opera, usually completing a distinct portion of the action
Aria	A solo number, the principal musical element of opera. In
Ensemble	Set pieces for two or more of the principal cast
Recitative	Two main types: (1) *recitativo semplice* or *secco* ('simple' or 'dry' recitative – only continuo and voice); (2) *recitativo accompagnato* or *stromentato* (accompanied or orchestral rectitative – normally reserved for more dramatic moments)
Overture	Generally known at the time as a 'sinfonia'; the instrumental number at the beginning of the opera. Only gradually during the 18C did it sometimes come to share thematic material with later music
Finale	The closing number of an act in *opera buffa*, involving an extensive section of music without recitative. It was intended to be climactic, and might involve different arias, ensembles, choruses, orchestral interludes, and usually a madcap finish
Lieto fine	Lit. 'happy ending'; the convention whereby operas ended on a happy note, even those with largely tragic plots

MOZART, *IDOMENEO*: ‘Tutte nel cor vi sento’

Elettra
Is Idomeneo dead?
The heavens contrive everything to our detriment!
Idamente can, if he wishes,
Command an empire, and a heart;
And does there remain a glimmer of hope for me?
Oh, I am indignant and miserable!
I shall see, Greece will see, to her shame,
A Trojan slave-woman
Share the throne and the nuptial bed…
In vain Elettra loves the ingrate…
A daughter of a king, who has kings as vassals, suffers
So that a common slave
Can aspire to a great conquest?
O indignation! O passion! O grief!
I can no longer bear it

No. 4 Aria
Furies of Hades, all of you I do feel in my heart.
Far away from such great torment are love,
Compassion, pity.
Upon her who stole that heart from me
That heart which betrayed mine
Let my fury bring vengeance and cruelty

MOZART, *ZAUBERFLÖTE*: CONTRASTS

Queen of the night
Hell's vengeance seethes in my heart;
The flames of death and despair engulf me!
If Sarastro dies not by your hand,
You will be my daughter no more!

Sarastro
O Isis and Osiris, grant the spirit of wisdom to the new-formed couple! Direct the Wanderer's steps to them, strengthen them with patience when in peril!

Papageno & Papagena duet
Pa-pa-gena / Pa-pa-geno
PO: Do you pledge yourself to me?
PA: Yes I pledge myself to you!
PO: So now you're my dear little wife!
PA: So now you're my heart's little dove!
Both: How happy we will be
if the gods are gracious
and bless our love with children
with darling little children

http://www.mvdaily.com/articles/2009/03/flute.htm

http://criterioncollection.blogspot.com/2007/06/71-magic-flute.html

http://www.eugeneopera.com/Opera_sets/MagicFlute_Set/MagicFlute_Sets.html

BEETHOVEN, FIDELIO ACT II NO. 14 EXCERPT

- **Florestan**
- I see a murderer before me!
- **Pizarro**
- Once more I will recall
- What you have done
- But one more moment,
- And then this dagger...
- *(He is about to stab Florestan; Leonora rushes forwards and screens Florestan with her body)*
- **Leonora**
- Stand back!
- **Florestan**
- O God!
- **Rocco**
- What's this?
- **Leonora**
- First you must stab this heart of mine
- May death befall you
- For your murderous intent
- **Pizarro** *(hurling her aside)*
- Are you mad?
- **Rocco** *(to Leonora)*
- Stand back!
- **Florestan**
- O God!
- **Pizarro**
- He shall be punished for this!
- Leonora *(again sheltering her husband)*
- First kill his wife!
- **Pizarro and Rocco**
- His wife?
- **Florestan**
- My wife?
- **Leonora** *(to Florestan)*
- Yes, I am Leonora!
- **Florestan**
- Leonora!
- **Leonora** *(to the others)*
- I am his wife, and I have sworn to save him
- *(to Pizarro)* and destroy you!
- **Pizarro**
- What brazen daring!
- **Florestan** *(to Leonora)*
- My heart stands still for joy!
- **Rocco**
- My blood runs cold with fear!
- **Leonora**
- (I defy his wrath! Destroy him!)
- **Pizarro**
- Ha! Ha! Shall I tremble before a woman
- My fury shall claim you both
- *(rushing at her and Florestan again)*
- Since you have shared your life with him,
- Now you shall share his death.
- **Leonora**
- You shall not escape your doom!
- First you must stab this heart of mine!
- *(quickly levelling a pistol at him)*
- Another word – and I will shoot!
- *(The trumpet is heard from the tower. Leonora embraces Florestan)*
- Ah you are saved! Thank God!
- **Florestan**
- Ah! I am saved! Thank God!
- **Pizarro** *(stunned)*
- The Minister! Hell and death!
- **Rocco** *(stunned)*
- Ah! What was that? God is just!

LECTURE RECAP – MAIN POINTS

- By the end of the century, opera buffa had thoroughly eclipsed opera seria as the dominant type of musical stage work
- Opera buffa encapsulated bourgeois values, as opposed to the self-consciously classical and aristocratic opera seria
- The extreme musical poles in opera were recitative(used to advance the story) and numbers (reflective interludes for one [aria] or more [ensemble] singers). Accompanied recitative falls somewhere between these two extremes
- The finale, an extended stretch of variegated musical and dramatic events with no intervening recitative, became one of the main areas of interest in opera buffa
- Gluck was famous for reforming opera seria. His work sees a synthesis of French, Italian and German traits
- Mozart wrote *opere serie* (*Idomeneo*, *La clemenza di Tito*), *opere buffe* (*Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Cosi*) and *Singspiel* (*Die Entfuhrung aus dem Serail*, *Die Zauberflote*)
- Around the time of the French revolution, there came a vogue for ‘rescue operas’, in which characters are saved from mortal peril